

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

260557Z Nov 01

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ACTION INR-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AF-00 A-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
DS-00 EUR-00 UTED-00 VC-00 TEDE-00 LAB-01 VCE-00  
NSAE-00 IRM-00 TEST-00 USIE-00 BBG-00 EPAE-00 IIP-00  
DSCC-00 DRL-02 NFAT-00 SAS-00 /003W  
-----42E9B6 260645Z /38

FM AMEMBASSY HARARE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0364  
INFO NSC WASHDC  
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK  
AMEMBASSY GABORONE  
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE  
AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS HARARE 003530

SIPDIS

AF/PD FOR COX, ROBERTSON, AF/S FOR SCHLACHTER, AF/P,  
INR/R/MR, NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [Z1 PREL PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT-OWNED RADIO ABOLISHES CALL-IN CURRENT  
EVENTS PROGRAMMING

1. THE STATE-OWNED ZIMBABWE BROADCASTING CORPORATION (ZBC) HAS CONVERTED ONE OF ITS FOUR RADIO STATIONS INTO AN 18-HOUR PER DAY SPORTS CHANNEL. THE NEW CHANNEL, NAMED "SPORTS FM," OCCUPIES THE FREQUENCY FORMERLY USED BY RADIO 1. RADIO 1 WAS AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE STATION OFFERING MUSIC, NEWS AND CALL-IN DISCUSSION PROGRAMS THAT FOCUSED ON CURRENT AFFAIRS. THE CONVERSION OF RADIO 1 TO "SPORTS FM" EFFECTIVELY ENDS ALL ADULT-ORIENTED CALL-IN RADIO PROGRAMMING IN ZIMBABWE.
2. RADIO 1 WAS THE LAST VESTIGE OF THE RHODESIAN BROADCASTING SERVICE. ITS ALL-ENGLISH FORMAT AND MUSIC PLAY LIST CATERED TO ZIMBABWEANS OF EUROPEAN ANCESTRY. CONSEQUENTLY, RADIO 1 HAD THE SMALLEST AUDIENCE AND WAS THE LEAST PROFITABLE OF ANY OF THE ZBC'S FOUR RADIO STATIONS. THE STATION DID, HOWEVER, HAVE A STRONG FOLLOWING AMONG A WIDE VARIETY OF ZIMBABWEANS FOR ITS EVENING CALL-IN CURRENT EVENTS PROGRAMS. THESE PROGRAMS OFFERED CITIZENS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS AND ASK PANELISTS QUESTIONS ABOUT IMPORTANT ISSUES. CALLERS FREQUENTLY VOICED SHARP CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT OR RULING PARTY.
3. OVER THE LAST 18 MONTHS, THESE PROGRAMS HAVE GRADUALLY BEEN CANCELLED, REDUCED TO PANEL DISCUSSIONS WITHOUT CALLS FROM THE AUDIENCE, OR RE-DIRECTED TO FOCUS ON NON-POLITICAL TOPICS. ZBC HAS NEVER OFFERED REASONS FOR THESE PROGRAM CHANGES, BUT THE POPULAR PERCEPTION IS THAT ZBC MANAGEMENT AND THEIR POLITICAL BOSSES WERE UNHAPPY ABOUT PROVIDING A FORUM FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO ONE CONTACT AT ZBC, THE "AUTHORITIES" HAD BECOME "VERY UNCOMFORTABLE" WITH PUBLIC COMPLAINTS ON THE CALL-IN PROGRAMS ABOUT THE "DEEPENING

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ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISIS UNDER PRESIDENT ROBERT MUGABE." BY CONVERTING THE STATION TO AN ALL-SPORTS FORMAT, THE ZBC NEATLY USES A DEFENSIBLE BUSINESS DECISION TO GIVE ITSELF A POLITICAL "COMFORT ZONE."

4. IN ADDITION TO REMOVING GENUINE DISCUSSION PROGRAMS FROM ZIMBABWEAN AIRWAVES, THE CONVERSION OF THE STATION TO ALL SPORTS HAS ALSO DEALT A BLOW TO PLACEMENT OF VOA PROGRAMMING. OF THE FOUR ZBC RADIO STATIONS, RADIO 1 HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST USER OF VOA NEWS, CURRENT AFFAIRS AND MUSIC PROGRAMS. HOWEVER, VOA PROGRAMMING WILL CONTINUE ON RADIOS 3 AND 4.

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